

RESURGAM

Unpublished Letters

BY

Oscar Wilde

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"I would be, not king over others—I am tired of being that, but a king without subjects—un roi dans le desert—Lord over my own soul only—over my own soul at last."

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*Of this little book twenty-five copies
have been privately printed by Clement
Shorter for distribution among his
friends. London : January 19th, 1917.*

*No 12
Clement Shorter*

INTRODUCTION

THE life of Oscar Wilde has been many times written—more frequently, perhaps, than that of any other modern man. It is scarcely necessary here to recapitulate the story. The second son of Sir William Wilde, oculist and antiquarian, Oscar was born in Westland Row, Dublin, in 1854. His early years were spent in his father's house in Merrion Square, at the corner of Lower Merrion Street, which I have passed many a time and never without thinking of the gay days when Lady Wilde, the "Speranza" of certain poems of genuine patriotism, held her Salon in the drawing-room of which the conservatory is so conspicuous a feature of the house. She was not, we fear, a wise mother, for she made her clever little son too great a feature for the entertainment of her guests. In 1864 Oscar Wilde went to school at Enniskillen, whence he proceeded as an exhibitor to Trinity College, Dublin. There, among other many distinctions, he gained the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek. In 1874, at twenty years of age, he went to Magdalen College, Oxford. Many of us remember the extraordinarily brilliant figure he cut in the semi-Bohemian social life of London in the early nineties, the interest that was felt in his various prose efforts, but much more in his plays, and the still greater interest in a personality that was always associated with witty sayings. Then came the terrible tragedy which opened with his libel action against the Marquis of Queensberry in March, 1895, followed by two trials in April and May of the same year, concluding with a sentence of two years' imprisonment. Wilde was sentenced on May 25th, 1895, and he was first sent to Pentonville, then to Wandsworth, and in November he was taken to Reading. He was released on May 19th, 1897, and crossed the same day to Dieppe, spending his last days entirely

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on the Continent. His visits to Dieppe were frequent. I saw him there in June, 1900. He died in Paris on November 30th, 1900. This pamphlet is not concerned with Oscar Wilde's meteoric success, but with the glimpses we have of him when attempting to recreate his life. Mr. Robert Ross informs me that when he was appointed executor and administrator of the Wilde estate, in 1906, he repaid the £100 that Mr. Dalhousie Young had advanced to Wilde, and he paid all the debts that he knew of or could hear of in accordance with Wilde's last wishes expressed to him a few days before he died. As is well known, Oscar Wilde left two sons, one of whom has been killed in the war. Neither brother commenced to enjoy the income from his father's literary estate until all the original creditors of his bankruptcy in 1895 had been paid twenty shillings in the pound with four per cent. interest, including the heirs of the late Lord Queensberry, who was the chief creditor; and Mr. Ross obtained special permission from the court to discharge also private debts, such as those of Mr. Dalhousie Young, although such debts could not have been recovered at law, as they were incurred after the bankruptcy. The opera referred to in the correspondence was never written, although had it been there is no doubt it might have been a very great success, for Mr. Dalhousie Young is an accomplished musician, who has gained great distinction, both in Vienna and Berlin, although less known in London. He was at one time a scholar of Balliol College, Oxford. After Wilde's release Mr. and Mrs. Young visited him at Berneval and showed him endless kindness.

Mr. Ross may be said to have contributed to the revived interest in Wilde's literary reputation by arranging the publication of two collected editions of his friend's works, which I am proud to retain

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on my shelves. Robert Ross is himself an art critic, I may add, and the author of light essays and parodies: my library claims one little book from his pen, entitled *Masques and Phases*, which he forwarded to me, with an inscription "To C.K.S."

Of things I do not know the names
For words I'm at a loss.
You know I am not Henry James.
I cannot write like Edmund Gosse.

No Granville Barker's buskin mine
To tread upon the corns of Law.
It is not mine with Max to shine.
I cannot dazzle Bernard Shaw.

Not mine Corelli's glowing page,
Nor yet the periods of Hall Caine.
Not mine a William Watson's rage.
I am not Lucas come again.

Only for me the cap and bells,
The motley of a jester's stock.
Alas! I am not H. G. Wells.
I am not even H. Belloc.

Oh call me childish or inept,
Untaught, untrained, untiled.
Oh call me anything except
The best of friends to Oscar Wilde.

Yet it was no small thing to be "the best of friends of Oscar Wilde" at a time when so many who had delighted to bask in

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the sunshine of his popularity had, perhaps excusably, thrown him over. In reading these letters, however, one feels that they reveal the mental twist which was undoubtedly associated with his genius. But Wilde was undoubtedly a great letter writer, as he was assuredly an accomplished wit. The first letter of this series demonstrates that Wilde once called himself "a lord of language," and the title is justified in many fine pages of his writings.

CLEMENT K. SHORTER.

January 15, 1917.

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To DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq.

Hotel de la Plage, Berneval-sur-Mer, Dieppe (1897).

My dear Young,—Of course I feel very lonely after you and my other good friends have gone away. I have no mourning, but I wear my red tie, “with a difference.”

It was to me the most delightful experience to receive your visit, and I am very grateful to you all for your pleasant and kindly companionship. I remember saying to you on Thursday night that when any man has even one friend God has given him two worlds to live in, and that is what I feel, what I know about friendship. Perhaps some day I may have the privilege of meeting your wife, who, I know, has spoken of me with sweetness of pity and gentleness of word. That will be something to look forward to, like the roses of deep summer or the red gold of the August corn.

Now I want you to advise me. I feel that here I have found, as it were, a home, and that to go farther afield looking for something better would be utterly ungrateful of me. You see how nice and kind everyone here is to me, and how simple and peaceful a life may be waiting for me in this little garden by the sea. It is so close to England, that from time to time my friends may make a “pilgrimage to the sinner”—the best form of pilgrimage perhaps, for kind hearts,—and though no miracles may be accorded to them, yet they will be able to work miracles themselves, for to help any human being, even to be able to do so, is a miracle compared to which the blooming of the dry staff of the Pope when Tannhauser knelt before him is, in my eyes, nothing. And while everything seems to help and heal me, from the honeysuckle that makes the air Arabia for me, to the moon that draws the reflux

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tides in such strange music to her feet, yet nothing can help or heal like the hand of a friend, and I seem to have far more now than I ever had, I suppose because I have, of course, far less, but know the wonderful beauty of friendship, from a new standpoint and see it with changed eyes.

It seems then to me that if I can get a nice chalet built here in a garden of my own, and be in my own home, as it would be, and lord of my own maimed life, I would be able to do beautiful work and speak to the world again on an instrument that has, I think, gained other strings, and become wider in possibility of range and effect. The price would be for the whole thing, freehold, the house built according to my views, with a great room to write in, and two large balconies to sun in, a *salle-à-manger*, three bedrooms, a kitchen and servants' room, offices and cellar, £500, which seems to me, whose views are no doubt tainted by the purple of my past, absurdly cheap. Now I want you to consider how this is to be done. If the money were got, on mortgage, and I paid 7 per cent. for it, it would only be £35 a year, and where could I find anything cheaper than a lovely little chalet of my own, with its trees and garden, and kind nice neighbours, and the sea making music for me at the end of the white chalk ravine, and peace, and the sense of not being a wanderer—for £35 a year. And, really, if I write a good play, and get it produced and have a success, there are certainly £3,000 to £5,000 waiting for me. The money one makes by plays is quite absurd, and now that I wish to live differently, £3,000 would be a real fortune. Of course I would then pay off the mortgage, and be, not king over others—I am tired of being that, but a king without subjects—*un roi dans le desert*—Lord over my own soul only—over my own soul, at last.

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Think over this like a good fellow, and tell me your views, and offer to your wife my thanks for many sweet kindnesses about me whose echo at any rate has reached me.—Sincerely,

OSCAR WILDE.

TO DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq.

Café Suisse, Dieppe (1897).

My dear Young,—The saltimbanques cannot come to the Berneval, so I don't know if there are enough attractions to drag you and Mrs. Young out so long a way. I shall be at the Café des Tribunaux at 3.30. Will you and Mrs. Young be there, and we will discuss the scheme of life?—Truly,

OSCAR WILDE.

TO DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq., 28, Rue Denfert-Rochereau, Paris.

Café des Tribunaux, Dieppe (14th September 1897).

My dear Young,—I shall be in Paris to-morrow for three or four days, Sebastian Melmoth, Hotel d'Espagne, Rue Taitbout, and would like to see you. I would also like to make some agreement about the Libretto of Daphnis and Chloe, if you still desire it.

I would ask you £100 down, and £50 on production, and I could go to work on it at once. I am on my way to Italy, where I hope to give myself up entirely to literature. Here there are too many people I know. Hoping to see you,—Believe me, Sincerely,

OSCAR WILDE.

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TO DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq.

Hotel Royal des Etrangers, Naples,

Tuesday, September 21, 1897

My dear Young,—I do not know if your letter and cheque have gone astray, or if they have not yet been sent. I left my address with the Hotel people in Paris, but nothing has as yet arrived, so I have just telegraphed to you.

Naples is grey with pouring rain, as elsewhere, I believe, but I am beginning to work. I hope you will send me some idea, or example, of the sort of recitative prose will suit best for music—also how many voices—kind of voices you propose to use, I think of this :

Daphnis—Tenor.
Shepherd—Baritone.
Priest of Venus—Bass.
Chloe—Soprano.
Venus—Contralto.

and, beside the general chorus permanent on the stage, a chorus of treble voices—shepherd-lads, who would come on about half through the opera—(when Chloe is deserted by Daphnis, they beg her to return to the sheepfold). Does this commend itself to you?

I enclose you one of the lyrics, so that you can begin. I fancy I could finish the thing in six weeks, but if you have not sent me yet the £100 agreed on, pray do so, as I am living here without any money, and want to move into apartments at Posilippo as soon as possible.

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I often think of our charming evenings at Dieppe, and of your wife's kindness and your own to me, and look forward to seeing you both again next year unless you come out here before that.

Pray give my kind regards to Mrs. Young.—Believe me, yours,
OSCAR WILDE.

To DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq.

Hotel Royal des Etrangers, Naples,

Wednesday, September 22, 1897.

My dear Young,—Your telegram arrived last night, and I am much obliged to you for your quick response—The “critical situation” was, of course, our entire lack of money. The £100 will solve the difficulty and give me the chance to work.

I forgot to say in my letter of yesterday that, of course, you must have at least one ballet, and shepherd dance—so you can work at that without words, as soon as you have set the lyric to music. I hope you like the lyric. I think it quite lovely.

With regard to the copyright of the words—when they are published with the music, I think we should share profits—when without music, the profits, if any, should be Bosie's and mine, and, of course, he reserves the right to publish his lyrics in his next volume, in fact, they are a gift to me—so while I use them, I cannot sell them.

To-day the weather is charming, and we are going to Posilippo.—
Yours, OSCAR WILDE.

Do you take the “Saturday Review”? If so, I wish you would let me see it after you have done with it. I can find no English paper here except the “Morning Post.”

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TO DALHOUSIE YOUNG, Esq.

Hotel Royal des Etrangers, Naples,

Saturday, September 25, 1897.

My dear Young,—I have given you a great deal of trouble, but I did not like a cheque in my own name. Of course, people already know here who I am, but I would not like to approach a strange banker with my own name on a cheque. Also, as you said, the cheque would be your wife's, I did not like my name to be in her pass-book or go through her account or yours, for that matter. Besides all these reasons—absurd I daresay—a cheque at Naples takes 10 or 11 days to cash—and I am at a Hotel of absurd prices—which I am anxious to leave at once. We have taken a villa at Posilippo—The Villa Giudice, Via Posilippo, Napoli, where pray write for the future. I enclose cheque, which for fear of accidents I have defaced.

I was greatly relieved to get your telegram last night, and hope to touch the money on Monday—to-morrow the office is closed.
—Believe me, truly,

OSCAR WILDE.

